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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Welfare: Debates and Differences**

In this brief introductory chapter, I want to sketch some key concepts in welfare and talk about how I will use them. The central task of the chapter therefore is to frontload many of the ideas and concepts that are threaded throughout this book at the outset so that they make sense where they appear. It is not my intention to give a complete overview of welfare and welfare states as this has been done extensively elsewhere. However certain concepts are important enough to warrant an overview meaning that this chapter functions somewhat as of a detailed glossary of key terms.

### *Welfare*

Ascribing meaning to the word welfare is hardly onerous when it is being used in the general sense as it is clearly concerned with the ideals of health, happiness and well-being, all inherently positive things that we would generally wish people to possess in abundance. However, I use the term welfare here in less general terms to refer, in the main, to social protection and what may also be referred to as social welfare or social assistance. When I am talking about welfare and the welfare state, I am in general talking about income maintenance as the suite of payments available in a welfare state for working-age recipients who may not be working or who may be unable to work. While used in a specialist sense, I deliberately want to use the word welfare in a positive manner as part of the act of reclaiming a word that has become contested and imbued with multiple meanings.

In the post-war context, it can be suggested that the word welfare and the term welfare state have undergone a semantic vicissitude in the popular lexicon, essentially moving from being words once imbued with the positivity of collective solidarity to becoming words now largely used in the pejorative, as slurs and points of attack, in the context of social welfare at least. In much of the literature, this tendency is largely grounded by

attributing the ideological origins of this paradigm shift to the American neoliberal paternalists (Murray, 1984, 1990, 1994; Mead, 1986, 1992) and communitarians (Etzioni, 1997; Selbourne, 1994) who separately advocated for the withdrawal of welfare state supports under the guise of promoting citizen self-reliance and disincentivising a culture of “dependency” (Gilbert, 2009; Dwyer, 2016; Wright and Patrick, 2019). While these types of discourses may have been American in origin in respect to the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century at least, they are undoubtedly much older than this, having a long history in European countries also (Fox-Piven and Cloward, 1993; Powell, 1992, 2017). In this book, I reject these negative discourses of welfare and ‘reclaim’ use of the word welfare in its most positive sense. This ‘reclaiming’ of the word welfare for use in a positive and, arguably, much more accurate way is a task that others have also taken up, notably Glennerster (2017, p. 4), who also acknowledges “a steady and deliberate attempt to devalue the English use of the word welfare to taint it with its American stigma” and who, as a result, similarly makes use of the word welfare in its most positive sense, thus disrupting what have become commonplace or common-sense understandings that help frame a negative welfare consensus (Jensen and Tyler, 2015; Patrick, 2017).

### *Welfare states*

Defining what is meant by a welfare state means entering a contested space on at least two fronts. What a welfare state is and what a welfare state does in terms of what could be included in a definition are both contested areas. I do not intend to muddy the waters further here and I will therefore stick to a simple conception of a welfare state as a state that takes some formal responsibility for the well-being of its populace. This conscious undertaking is usually then manifested in things like health, housing, education and, of course, income maintenance (the latter is the general area of interest here). However, I want to stress that this should not be taken to imply some sort of unilateral beneficence on the part of governments. Rather, governments and society, in general, are the mutual beneficiaries of a healthy, well-educated and secure populace and therefore a welfare state is arguably something to aspire to.

In a practical sense, there are also different models of welfare states and this is a factor I want to draw attention to briefly. For simplicity, and to utilise the seminal work of Esping-Andersen (1990), it may be helpful to set out the commonly prescribed welfare state models as follows:

- **A conservative or corporatist model:** Strongly based on the concept of social insurance, also known as contributory payment schemes;
- **A liberal or residual model:** Strongly based on social assistance type payments, also known as non-contributory schemes; and
- **A social democratic or universal model:** Strongly based on universal or non-means-tested payments.

In reality, things are seldom this simple and most welfare states have some of the features of all three types described above. Nevertheless, Britain and Ireland, along with perhaps Australia, Canada and the United States, do generally tend to be referred to as liberal or residual welfare states. Nordic countries such as Norway, Sweden and Denmark and generally referred to as universal or social democratic welfare states and Germany would be an example of a country that has traditionally favoured a corporatist regime.

This task of modelling welfare state types, particularly in Europe, features most notably in the work of Esping-Andersen (1990) in his seminal book entitled *Three worlds of welfare capitalism*. It has since been built on by large level institutional work concerning welfare attitudes across jurisdictions by authors like Larsen (2006) and Wendt, Mischke and Pfeifer (2011). For its part, the work of Larsen convincingly shows that particular types of welfare state models can produce particular types of attitudes towards deservingness and produce particular levels of stigma ultimately producing particular experience types. Simply put, this rests on the assertion, illustrated here by Dukelow and Considine (2017, p. 195) that:

While social security may be represented as quite a technical system of finance, it is underpinned by competing ideological traditions and values, which have different views of the system and its purpose.

Following Dukelow and Considine (2017), this book suggests that the modern welfare state is underpinned by and reflective of particular notions of social deservingness that rely on particular logics of poorness and poverty that are likely to be historically mediated.

### *Poor relief*

Much of this text is spent looking at deep historical concepts and practices. This means that while the object of inquiry consistently remains social deservingness in respect to the poor and impoverished, the nomenclature used to describe the poor and impoverished have shifted and changed. In

contemporary discourse, we encounter welfare where in historical parlance we would have encountered ‘poor relief’. This is a shift in semantics rather than in object. Social welfare, social assistance or social protection, are all essentially modern terms for the concept of poor relief and the provision of welfare is the modern equivalent for the practice of relieving the poor. Were it not so, that is if there were no poor to relieve, there would be no need for welfare, whatever we may call it. Nevertheless, where the term poor relief is used here and where it is generally to be found in use throughout the literature it does refer to historical concepts and practices.

### *Measuring deservingness*

In modern welfare states, deservingness is generally neither decided upon arbitrarily nor fully as an act of discretion (see Ryan and Power, 2020; Ranerup and Henriksen, 2020 for discussions on the concept of discretion and decision making). Rather, who gets what and what they should have to do in order to get it is decided through complex welfare processes that involve various calculations in respect to things like means, work history, previous or existing claims and so on. Welfare states are also underpinned by complex processes of taxation (Byrne and Ruane, 2017). Distilling this down further and focusing on how deservingness, in particular, is decided within and by the welfare state, a claimant’s worthiness is often mediated by a process known as the ‘means test’. This in turn reveals one of the core and continuing debates concerning the administration of differing forms of social policy in respect to the nature of the benefit given along with the means of deciding who gets what. The principal dichotomy lies between administering selective benefits and universal ones. In administering selective benefits, common in what may be termed liberal or residual welfare regimes, resources are targeted, using pre-determined thresholds or cut-off points, only at those deemed most in need on the basis that this is both cost-effective and fair (Dukelow and Considine, 2017; Glennerster, 2017). In administering universal benefits, common in what may be referred to as institutional welfare regimes, benefit is conferred as a matter of right and/or of citizenship. In residual or more selective regimes, the core tool for deciding eligibility is the ‘means test’ (Dukelow and Considine, 2017; Glennerster, 2017).

There has been an abundance of scholarship in this area and on the effects of both universal and selective regimes, in terms of the impacts these processes can have on claimants which are ultimately contested. However, for simplicity, at its most straightforward the argument is that selective, means-tested benefits, are potentially stigmatising whilst universal, non-

means-tested benefits are not or are at least less so (Titmuss, 1987). It is perhaps more nuanced than this in reality and it should be noted that the concept of either a purely residual or indeed purely institutional welfare regime is more reflective of two opposite poles on a continuum rather than an existing reality, with most welfare states combining elements of both even when favouring one over the other (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Nevertheless, when considering deservingness in the context of welfare, such a continuum is instructive.

A review of the post-war scholarship in respect to selectivity, or residualism, versus universalism, leads us to Richard Titmuss (1968, p. 134), who was undoubtedly a strong voice in favour of a publicly funded universalist approach and an equally strong critic of selectivist means-tested approaches. He sums this up here in the following terms.

If all services are provided – irrespective of whether they represent benefits, amenity, social protection or compensation – on a discriminatory, means-tested basis, do we not foster both the sense of failure and the stigma of public burden? The fundamental objective of all such tests of eligibility is to keep people out; not to let them in.

So then, following Titmuss here, it is suggested that the technical processes involved in testing the means of welfare claimants in contemporary welfare states are, in effect, one aspect of the actualisation of the parameters of social deservingness within an administrative context. They represent social deservingness in action, and they were foreshadowed in early poor relief by things like less eligibility and the workhouse test, each of which we will come to look at in paragraphs further on. In respect to social deservingness, the process of means-testing answers the ‘who’ question in **who** deserves to get what and **what** they should have to do in order to get it. We turn next to the ‘what’.

### ***Welfare conditionality***

Conditionality has arguably always been part of formalised welfare regimes dating at least as far back as the poor laws and the condition of less eligibility (Dukelow and Considine, 2017; Powell, 1992, 2017). Nevertheless, in terms of structured formalisation, there has arguably been a more pronounced turn towards welfare conditionality in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries (Whelan, 2020a, 2020b, 2021). Conditionality is often designed as a means of promoting re-entry to the workforce for those experiencing unemployment. Conditionality then makes up the ‘what’

portion of social deservingness in the question of **who** deserves to get what and **what** they should have to do in order to get it.

In defining what is meant by welfare conditionality, the following definition, taken from the Welfare Conditionality (2019, p. 8) final findings report provides a useful starting point:

Welfare conditionality links eligibility for collectively provided welfare benefits and services to recipients' specified compulsory responsibilities or particular patterns of behaviour. It has been a key element of welfare state reform in many nations since the mid-1990s.

Here the concept of eligibility is linked to specified responsibilities and patterns of behaviour and this essentially captures the inherent nature of welfare conditionality. However, building on this definition it can also be argued that many aspects of welfare conditionality are simply 'expected' without necessarily being explicitly or overtly specified, constituting the mundane reality of life in the welfare space. There are also, arguably, hidden or at least less well-known areas of conditionality that may only become apparent when the boundaries that they set down are contravened (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018; Whelan, 2020a, 2021). Conditionality then is the 'where you must go and what you must do' element of social deservingness.

### *Stigmatised deservingness*

It would be simplistic to think that once the 'who' and 'what' have been decided that somehow social deservingness exists in a pure form, free from scrutiny, suspicion or public derision. I, therefore, want to bring the who and what questions that are formally arbitrated within welfare states forward here and by doing so, introduce a more specifically social element. The concept of social stigma then is instructive here as it arguably has a very direct relationship with notions of social deservingness in that it acts to temper social deservingness. It is also useful here as a means of distinguishing between legal-rational types of deservingness and specifically social deservingness on the basis that just because deservingness has been *decided* legally or formally, that does not mean it is *accepted* socially. There is a burden to social deservingness then that Titmuss (1968) described as the "stigma of public burden" in the context of welfare which, in the end, could be said to constitute an "ungenerous gift" (Boland and Griffin, 2016).

There can be little doubt that any thorough discussion of stigma will, at the very least, allude to the work of Goffman (1990a, 1990b) and I will do so briefly here. The intention is not to look deeply at the concept of stigma, but

I do want to unpack it briefly to offer a context to the idea of stigmatised deservingness spoken about above. The Goffmanian thesis of stigma begins with a discussion on the historical origins of stigma; Goffman (1990a, p. 11) evokes the Greeks who enacted stigma through purposely imposed

...bodily signs...that were...burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal or a traitor—a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places.

Here, stigma works as a form of explicit ‘othering’ and is recognised by being displayed in inherently physical ways, though perhaps with obvious psychological repercussions for the bearer also. However, the historical propensity for such practices is also noted by Scambler (2018, p. 55) who suggests that there may have been an economic, as well as social impetus behind them:

The mark literally scarred into the flesh of Attican and Athenian slaves ‘othered’...[s]laves were valuable assets and their branding – the mark was called a ‘stigma’ – minimised the risk of escape.

So then, the physical ascription of a stigma in the form of a “mark scarred into the flesh” saw the slave as an asset marked for the purpose of protecting a valuable investment. This practice of those higher up the economic ladder marking out those below them for economic purposes would repeat throughout history, ultimately taking different forms. In respect to welfare and logics of poorness and poverty, the badging of the poor in early modern England provides a further example of marking persons out for economic purposes. In the context of deservingness, this practice, the enforced wearing of a badge, literally separated the deserving from the undeserving. Hindle (2004, p. 10) talks about the importance of this here:

The shame of pauperization received its ultimate symbolic representation in the badging of the poor under the statute of 1697. This was, potentially, not only a critical episode in the history of poverty and poor relief, but also arguably the single most decisive moment in the creation of social identity in early modern England. The act ordered that all poor persons receiving parish relief must wear a badge in red or blue cloth on the shoulder of the right sleeve in an open and visible manner. Any parish officer who dispensed relief to a poor person not wearing a badge could be fined 20s. for each disbursement, and any pauper who refused the badge was either to have their relief withdrawn or to be whipped and committed to bridewell for three weeks’ hard labour. In requiring that the wives and children of parish paupers also wear the badge, moreover, the act powerfully insisted upon the notion that idleness was an inherited condition, propagated by feckless



parents who lacked the moral compass to inculcate habits of industry and discipline in their offspring.

It is clear then that the ascription of stigma in historical contexts was complex. For Goffman (1990a) it appears to have been about identifying “the ritually polluted”, those persons that others should generally avoid. The mark in this instance is not the stigma, rather it is indicative of the stigma, the impact of which was to ‘other’ the bearer. However, there were clearly also economic reasons for marking persons out, as noted by Scrambler (2018) and by Tyler in more recent work. Tyler (2018, 2020), in particular, has contributed one of the most meaningful critiques of the Goffmanian thesis of stigma to emerge in recent years and in doing so has gone some way towards reconceptualising stigma as a useful concept for sociology. In doing so, Tyler (2018, 2020) questions the fundamental basis of the Goffmanian thesis.

A further criticism, and one made specifically in the context of social policy, comes by way of Titmuss (1974, p. 45) who suggests that:

The trouble...with Goffman and many other American writers on the subject of ‘stigma’ and social policy is that they are extraordinarily parochial. They generalise and develop sophisticated theories on the basis of American values and mythologies about independence, work, thrift, private enterprise, the self-made man...

This assertion by Titmuss (1974) at once critiques Goffman and others while still acknowledging the importance of stigma as a concept for social policy. Pinker (1971, p. 175), writing in the context of social policy, has also noted that importance and relevance of stigma by stating that “The imposition of stigma is the commonest form of violence used in democratic societies.”

This powerful statement denotes an acceptance on the part of Pinker (1971) as to the implicit existence of stigma in the context of social policy and, in speaking of an “imposition”, also suggests a sense of purposefulness on the part of those tasked with developing policy in this area (Page, 1984). For our purposes, it suggests that as a form of symbolic violence in the contexts of welfare, poverty and poor relief, stigma impacts by delegitimising and tainting social deservingness through the “stigma of public burden” (Titmuss, 1974) and through the imposition of shame. At an experiential level, stigma, where it is realised, can often, though perhaps not always, produce shame, which is, as Fischer (2018) points out, “notoriously, a painful emotion”. Shame then, and its cognate feelings are more experientially

pronounced for being mediated through normative ideas concerning goodness and good citizenship (Whelan, 2020b; Schefer and Munt, 2019; Scheff, 2006). The fact that such notions have a distinct social dimension shows us how stigma is realised, as Pinker has denoted, as a form of violence in the contexts of both modern welfare and historical poor relief and in the broader sociology of sociality, thus impacting widespread notions of social deservingness.

If we include this analysis in the broader analysis of who should get what and what they should have to do in order to get it, we may say that once welfare states have decided on who should get what and on what the conditions are for legitimate receipt, social stigma continues to evoke and temper notions of social deservingness through a process of symbolic violence manifesting in shame. Graphically, it can be represented as follows:



Figure 1.1: Stigmatised social deservingness

Effectively, what I am arguing here then is that there are two aspects to deservingness in the context of welfare and poor relief that operate on formal and informal levels. Formal deservingness is decided in and through welfare states via the who and what processes represented by means-testing and conditionalities. This is a formal, legal and legitimate type of deservingness, though arriving at it can be an inherently stigmatising process (Whelan, 2020a, 2020b, 2021). Once the receipt of welfare or relief has been realised as a legal recognition of deservingness, that deservingness takes on a social form, becoming stigmatised deservingness, affected by the symbolic violence that stigma implies and, to use Scambler's (2018) phrase, "heaping shame upon blame" in a way that is reflective of 'common sense' logics of poorness and poverty (Jensen and Tyler, 2015; Nielsen, 2021). This socially constituted form of deservingness in the context of welfare and poor relief is then actualised by the type of "moral coerciveness" warned against by John Stuart Mill (1991/1859, p. 8) as far back as 1859, which, in light of the fact that it so eloquently captures the sentiment of what is being communicated here, is worth quoting in full:

Society can and does execute its own mandates: and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right, or any mandates at all in things with which it ought not to meddle, it practises a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life and enslaving the soul itself.

The burden of stigmatised deservingness then lies heavy on those who must bear it, it penetrates deeply into their lives and enslaves their soul. In the chapters to follow we begin the task of examining the concept of social deservingness by illustrating how it has been historically discoursed by a broad range of thinkers through a long period of history. If, as is proposed here, welfare states are a particular and overt expression of social and collective notions of deservingness, the concept of deservingness itself is a much older proposition and one which has been discussed in various ways by various important thinkers and in the context of various schools of philosophy and thought. Indeed, debates that straddle the fault line that runs between deserving and undeserving are arguably ancient in the human sense and certainly in the sense of social humanity. If Hegel's assertion that Socrates awoke, within the ancient Greeks, a sense of individuality and the consciousness needed to question what is good and what is bad, then we must at least go this far back. Undoubtedly, in the idiom of human welfare and the collective organisation thereof, debates surrounding deservingness, in the context of who should get what and what they should have to do in

order to get it, have been omnipresent, taking in discourses surrounding sturdy beggars, the able-bodied and impotent poor, up to and including formalisation via the workhouse test and its direct descendant the means test.

The plan for the chapters to follow is to track notions of deservingness by exploring how such notions have been treated by various major thinkers and schools of thought, primarily in the western philosophic tradition and across centuries of discourse. It should be said at the outset that though the work in these pages bears some of the hallmarks of the genealogical approach, I do not claim that it represents a thorough genealogy of deservingness as this would require at least twice again the pages committed to this book. Rather, the purpose is to give context by transmitting a sense of what social deservingness means, how it has been discoursed and how it is ultimately fixed in some respects and malleable in others, as evidenced by changing ideas over time. In this respect, a starting point is needed, and a degree of selectivity is also required; this inevitably means that much is necessarily left out. With this caveat in mind, the following chapters will still focus on specific and arguably important historical periods. A start is made by looking at classical Athens and the Graeco-Roman period thus taking-in Plato and Aristotle with respect to the former, along with the philosophies of Epicureanism and Stoicism in the case of the latter. From here, early Christianity will be considered and therefore the works of Augustine and Aquinas along with the person of St Francis will be explored. Moving from early Christianity to the Protestant Reformation represents a natural bridge and so the writings of Luther and Calvin will be investigated; this particular juncture in the book also briefly takes in the Northern Renaissance. Following this, the focus will shift more to individual thinkers taking in the absolutism of Thomas Hobbes and the early liberalism of John Locke before seeking to include some more radical voices in the persons of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Paine and Karl Marx. Next, the work of some classical political economists in the persons of Adam Smith, David Ricardo and Thomas Malthus will be examined along with the processes and practices of early poor relief. Finally, I will show briefly how the logics of poorness, poverty and deservingness sketched throughout the book are alive and practised in contemporary welfare states by offering a brief synthesis of contemporary literature.

When dealing with historical figures, it should be noted that not all of these authors have addressed deservingness in the context of welfare in a direct way and therefore, an interpretation of their words is necessary. With that being said, each has had something important to say on a variance of related

topics from how we are to how we should be and what we should do, to how society should be organised. Therefore, while interpretation may be necessary it is not stretched or forced in any way. Indeed, the words of those under consideration are placed at the forefront of the analysis here where this is possible. Ultimately, identifying continuity and change in respect to deservingness forms a major task for this book. Essentially, however, the book will both argue and show that deservingness as a concept in the context of welfare almost always ends up devolving on the same set of fundamental arguments. The first of these is that across the centuries, who deserves to get what is almost always decided by those who have the most: it therefore concerns the poor.

more restrictive, residual and stigmatised forms of welfare provision and cognate ideas about deservingness.

### **Plato and Aristotle: Radical departures and the rule of the mean**

What then of the philosophic discourses of classical Athens? Here I want to concentrate briefly on the words of Plato (427-347 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC). There are of course others from this period and from the pre-Socratic period who may have a significant bearing on a discussion on the concept of deservingness. However, Plato and Aristotle are chosen as they remain active in the public consciousness and imagination. Aristotle in particular has had an enormous impact on the subsequent two thousand years or so of thought and so represents a natural starting point (Russell, 1946/1996). Moreover, Plato and Aristotle, along with Socrates tend always to be linked or sequenced which is not surprising given that Plato was a student of Socrates and Aristotle would go on to be a student of Plato, remaining at his academy for 20 years or so (Russell, 1946/2004). In the following paragraphs, I am going to focus on Plato and Aristotle together rather than separately on the basis that their vast differences in broad political philosophising coupled with their essential similarity in respect to how they treat matters of deservingness concerning the poor beget an interesting and somewhat jarring juxtaposition.

Plato's most famous and most complete work, at least in respect to the concept of society, is undoubtedly *The Republic* (375BC/2000). In many ways, *The Republic* remains a literary triumph. Presented in the form of a Socratic dialogue, in it, Plato essentially rejects participatory democracy and the rights of the individual on the basis that the state must and should be placed above the individual in order to foster stability, order and justice. This was a radical tract at the time it was written and remains so now, bordering as it does on a type of communistic utopia, culminating in the form of *Kallipolis*, the like of which has much in common with a politics of radicalism. Coupled with this, however, is a deeply conservative treatise that promotes the idea of a hereditary ruling class, an excluded working class and a remaining slave class. Whatever one may make of *The Republic* now, what Plato presents is notable in that his views are extreme and undoubtedly strive toward something new and different. Aristotle, on the other hand, departs from his old master and follows the 'rule of the mean' which essentially decries any form of extremism. In doing so he rejects much of what his old master suggests.